

## OPEN LETTERS.

### The term *phytobiology*.

The ever increasing attention given to the different phases of adaptation is making evident the need for an agreement upon some comprehensive term to express its study. At present the word *biology* is generally employed for the purpose in English, and there is perhaps a tendency to limit its application to this use; but the fact that the word has been understood in so many meanings, or at all events, shades of meaning, makes it by itself an unsatisfactory term, especially for botanists who must fain explain that it is plant biology they mean. The words *ækology* and *bionomics*, coined for this very purpose, are awkward, little used, and except to the learned do not explain their own etymology. A single word in English, answering to the German *Pflanzenbiologie*, does not appear to be in use, and I have therefore ventured to employ in publication (reference in BOT. GAZ. 19: 345. 1894) the equivalent and self-explanatory word *phytobiology*. I wish to ask whether there is any objection to this term, etymological, botanical or practical, and if so, what better one can be suggested; and also whether it has yet been published elsewhere in English.—W. F. GANONG, *Smith College, Northampton, Mass.*

[We may call Prof. Ganong's attention to the action of the Madison Botanical Congress (Proceedings p. 36) upon this point in recommending the use of the term *ecology* to designate the subject matter covered by the German *Pflanzenbiologie*. It is quite true that ecology has as yet been little used, but it is rather because the subject matter has been little studied in this country than because the word is awkward or unintelligible. Moreover the objection that it is "little used" lies equally against "phytobiology" and must lie at first against any new word. Ecology is already in the dictionaries, though (in the Century at least) under *Æ*. The committee of the Congress which considered this subject thought it better to take a word already coined than to construct a new one. The modification in spelling suggested is in harmony with spelling reform and with the common word *economy*, of similar roots.

The word *phytobiology* seems to us open to very serious objection because of its etymology. It ought by construction to be the equivalent of the word botany, i. e., that division of biology which is engaged with plants. Witness, similarly, phytopathology, phytochemistry, phytogeography. *Phytobiology*, moreover, is already in the language under the meaning just stated, for it is defined in the Century dictionary and a citation of its use in this sense given.—EDS.]